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ABSTRACT

Using first-hand material collected by interview and observation during a 160-day trip around 21 states, this report describes the current situation of democratic participation in small-town schools. The small-town school is like a vortex drawing everyone into its activities and serving as a foundation for the community's social and cultural lives. Although student participation in small-town school extracurricular activities was high, students rarely expressed enthusiasm for their schoolwork and student leaders felt they had very little influence on how their schools operate. No student council was found to be a player in any aspect of school life except social events. A lack of communication between administrators and teachers was also found; teachers did not feel that their superintendents were accessible or thus their ideas and feelings were often heard by their principals; formed meetings in particular were ineffective in resolving problems. Many male administrators had been coaches and conceived of communication and teamwork as unidirectional and hierarchical. Teachers, 75% women, were frustrated at faculty meetings, yet were not telling their administrators about their feelings. Teachers also complained that they as a group were under unreasonable attacks, both nationally and statewide. Informal interaction among teachers seemed to be satisfactory, but formal collegial collaboration was infrequent. Regarding the interactions of teachers with students, small-town kindergartens were reported to be operating better than schools. About 80% of observed interactions involved teacher's unidirectional lecturing. Another serious problem is economic; the small-town school is seriouslyjeopardized by worsening economic conditions in the towns. Perhaps the absence of collaboration and cooperation in small-town schools may be understood by considering the overload carried by administrators and teachers. It is concluded that renewal of small-town schools requires renewal and reinvigoration of the educators, an increased sence of commitment to the academic side of schooling by the parents, and more avenues of influence for the students. As regards economic and structural problems these will not be resolved without state and federal assistance. (GGH)

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Democratic Participation in Small-Town Schools

by

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With interest in taking a first-hand look at democratic participation in small-town schools, we spent 160 days on sabbatical driving 9,452 miles along what William Least Heat Moon called the "Blue Highways" of America. We visited 25 school districts serving isolated small towns in 21 states.

Our odyssey started on the day after New Year's, 1989, when we left Eugene, Oregon in a 22-foot Tioga RV, nicknamed for its want of speed, The White Tortoise. We drove south through the fertile valleys of California, reading the Grapes of Wrath aloud, east across the deserts and mountains of the Southwest, and through Texas and Louisiana into Mississippi. Then we zigzagged north up the cotton-rich Mississippi Delta through the drought-stricken corn and wheat fields of the Midwest to Lake Superior, turned west across the northern tier of states and finally crossed the Columbia River in early June, as we read the last pages of Steinbeck's masterpiece, and rested our eyes on snow-capped Mount Hood.

Using Dialogue Information Services and a map, we randomly chose K-12 school districts in incorporated towns having from 300 to 3,000 students, and lying more than 75 miles from a college of education. Actually, our sample of 25 districts turned out to range in size from just under 500 to about 2,000 students, and the distances from teacher-training sites, except for one private college with a small, teacher training program, ranged from 75 to 250 miles. In all, we visited 80 schools, interviewing 25 superintendents, 14 district-office personnel, 84 principals (including assistants), 28 board members, 119 teachers, 19 classes of students, 14 individual students, 7 newspaper editors, and a scattering of custodians, counselors, clergy, and citizens at large. In addition to the 19 classes with whom we conducted group interviews, we observed over 50 classes, ranging from kindergarten to senior English Literature.

We went in search of democratic participation, i.e., citizen involvement, administrators ahd teachers sharing influence, teacher collaboration, student voice, and cooperative learning in classrooms. We wondered, along with others who have written

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recently about the lack of collaboration and shared influence in schools, if small is better than big. Does the small, structurally less complex school actualize democratic relationships better than the big urban and suburban schools written about so often in the current reform reports? Are the participants less individuated and alienated in small schools? Are small, isolated schools more participatory than schools in dense population centers? Is small really beautiful in American education?

To answer those research questions, we spent three or four days interviewing and observing in each district and the following two to three days of each week putting our transcripts and reflections on a portable Toshiba computer. Our interviews were open-ended and semi-structured. We started with general questions about the accomplishments and challenges of the district or school, funnelling gradually toward more specific questions and probes about participation. We asked slightly different questions of people in different roles, but eventually asked everyone about his or her perceptions of participation in the district, school, and classroom. We merged notes from our interviews, as well as from our observations of meetings and classes, keeping only points about which we agreed. Overall, we amassed 750 single-spaced pages of notes. In addition, we picked up statements of district philosophy and goals, board procedures, policy manuals, guidelines for student behavior, procedures to evaluate teachers, course syllabi, and newspaper clippings.

This paper is an initial attempt to wrestle with our gargantuan data-base by presenting an overview of our most obvious findings. Later we will tell a more complete and detailed story in a book.

The Small-Town School as Vortex

In Oregon, rivers rush relentlessly out of the mountains bringing the snow to the sea. As rafters, we delight in maneuvering over the white rapids and waves to experience both an exciting ride and the joy of teamwork. The wild, untamed river allows for a lull now and then, in the form of an eddy, a safe, whirling vortex of water with a vacuum at its center into which anything caught in its motion is drawn. The vortex offers a resting place for the rafters before taking on the next challenge of the river.

Descartes believed that vortexes of fluid could account for the very formation of the universe. Our data indicated that the small-town school is like a vortex drawing everyone into it and serving as a foundation for the community. The school engages virtually everyone, regardless of age, because like the river's eddy, it irresistibly draws the community's residents into it. The small town, like the eddy, encompasses everything within its tenacious reach. The people in small towns surrender their

privacy, independence, and autonomy and instead of being anonymous, they seek relationships that they report are friendly, supportive, and caring. Administrators and teachers are public figures; they must be concerned with propriety and public relations because the people's thoughts about their community center on the school. People go to the school for education, entertainment, social life, and community identity. In one town of 5,000 it was reported that the Christmas pageant draws 6,000 spectators. Much more than the church, city hall, or the tavern, the school occupies the townspeople for considerable time in its classes, sports events, club meetings, potluck dinners, recreational events, musical concerts, open houses, and theatrical presentations before they return again to the flow of private life.

High schools are particularly busy places. The majority of high-school students arrive at school 30 minutes or more before classes begin and don't reach home until after 5:30 p.m. They participate in many extracurricular activities, including sports, music, theatre, and service and special interest clubs. Approximately 40% of the teachers participate as coaches, sponsors, or advisors in after-school activities. The administrators spend as much time at school as the very busiest of students. On a Friday evening, two-thirds of the town's population could be cheering on the boys at a football, basketball, or even hockey game depending on the geographic location and the time of year. The visiting team could have been on a bus for as many as 175 miles followed by a caravan of 10 to 15 cars filled with fans from the visitor's community. In at least half of the districts we visited, elementary and middle schools were used in the evenings for recreation, adult education, and community meetings. The elementary schools attracted over 80% of parents to open houses and evaluation conferences. There was no one in town who didn't know where the schools were, and after we were in town for a few days, it seemed as though there was no one in town who didn't know who we were. No matter whether we were in the West, South, Midwest, or plains, citizens of all ages were being continually drawn into the town's safe vortex, its schools.

In fact, the culture of the small-town schools we visited extended beyond regional differences. A school in a Hispanic mining community of the Southwest, or one that was primarily Black in the rich farmland of the Mississippi Delta, or a school built in 1893 and populated by the sturdy and orderly Norwegians of the Midwest -- all looked more alike than they were different. Horace Mann dreamed the school would unify, that it would serve the commonweal. Although any particular small-town school does not always bring together diverse American subcultures, it does offer a common culture, regardless of where you go, for 5 to 18-year-olds in our American society. And small-town schools, perhaps more than their urban counterparts, do more than that: they bring citizens together to enhance a feeling of community identity.

The Participation of Students

Although the amount each student participated in small-town school activities was very high, it was rare for students to tell us that they were enthusiastic about schoolwork. When asking secondary students how they felt about school, again and again we heard the lilting refrain, "boring." When asked, what was good about school, from kindergartners to seniors, the response was similar: friends were the best thing about school. In that way, small-town students were no different from their urban counterparts. When we probed them about their boredom, they spoke not about extracurricular activities, but about particular classes and teachers. Students considered many of their teachers to be uninterested in them as individuals, to lack a sense of humor, and to be teaching their subject almost like robots, without involvement and enthusiasm. In contrast, students saw good teachers taking an interest in them as people, cracking jokes and appreciating student humor, and showing a genuine commitment to their subject. Even though the typical small-town high school classes had fewer than 20 students, we saw only a few cases of active discussion involving more than a couple of students and the teacher.

In our interviews with elected student leaders, we found that they think they have very little voice in influencing how their school operates. The sorts of influence they enjoyed were organizing homecoming events, designing a schedule of school-wide assemblies, procuring the music for dances, and getting the administrators to allow one day in the spring for students to wear shorts. Unlike their urban counterparts, the small-town students encountered very little, if any, problem with drugs, and we saw student leaders actively making public stands against drugs. Curricula about the problems of using drugs were in virtually every school district we visited. We did, however, find frequent use of alcohol, and administrators and coaches reported difficulty in enforcing no-alcohol rules, particularly in communities where adult use of alcohol was supported by local norms. In many towns, strong enforcement followed only after the shocking death of drinking teenagers in a car crash.

Although in many states there are laws against corporal punishment, we found the paddle still being used two or three times a month in more than half of our districts. Most paddling was being carried out in the upper elementary and middle school grades, but we also witnessed it in a high school. At 3:30 p.m. one afternoon we saw 19 high school students (18 boys and 1 girl) lined up outside the principal's office to get paddled. The routine was that the students entered the principal's office one at a time each to receive two swats. The students accepted the paddling as a better alternative to that of spending one hour after school in a detention study hall.

In general we found student participation and involvement without student influence or power. We did, however, find one high school in the deep South that was reaping the rewards of earlier student collaboration and cooperation. A racially segregated system in 1970 successfully moved to a racially integrated school. White and Black administrators met together, arranging for student leaders of both schools to meet and establish student policies and programs together. Black and White students had a voice in shaping the policies of their new school, offering still today an exemplary case of a school that is racially integrated and functioning well. That example was in sharp contrast to a similar community, not far away, which responded to the desegregation order by forming a White private academy, rendering today a nearly bankrupt public system and an educationally bereft private school.

Today, in 1989, we found no school in which the student council was a player in any aspects of school life, except social events. In most schools, administrators told us that the student council was ineffective if not inoperable. Four high schools provided some leadership training to students, but in most cases, when a student council existed, it was mainly a perfunctory demonstration of representative democracy. Although in two schools we did find formal surveys of students' attitudes being taken, the purpose was, in both cases, to respond to a state-wide mandate for school evaluation rather than a local initiative for school improvement.

The Participation of Administrators with Teachers

Administrators were much more likely than teachers to view their participation with teachers in favorable terms. Superintendents explained how the small size of the district made frequent informal contact possible with the teachers. The majority of principals saw themselves with an "open door", referred to the informality and openness of their relationships with teachers, and spoke of the family feeling in the school. In contrast, teachers much more often spoke about communication problems in the district. They did not think, by and large, that their superintendent was accessible, nor did they believe their ideas and feelings were often being heard by their principals.

Formal meetings, in particular, were ineffective in eliciting open and frank exchanges between principals and teachers. The principal always took the role of convener, controlled the agenda, and spoke more than 75% of the time in faculty meetings that we observed. Usually, the meetings were held in large classrooms, the lunchroom, or the library; the teachers sat dispersed in separate clusters haphazardly arranged facing the principal. In almost every instance in high schools, the male teachers sat clustered in the back of the room and the female teachers sat in the front.

Fortunately we found a few districts and buildings where administrators and teachers were seriously engaged in cooperative group work. Of the 25 superintendents we interviewed, only three had a vision of leading their districts in collaborative ways of working together. Of the 78 buildings we visited, ten had ways of enlisting teachers' feedback, of sharing responsibilities at meetings in which teachers were active participants, of forming small-group meetings among teachers, and of convening a steering committee or advisory group that met regularly with the principals.

Meetings involving the superintendent, his district-office associates, and the principals were overall more effective than school-site meetings. At the superintendent's meetings, people frequently sat around a table and every participant typically spoke during the meeting. We saw some instances of paraphrasing, summarizing, and clarifying; we saw very few instances, however, of systematic problem solving or consensual decision making. When asked, principals said they appreciated such meetings because they were provided necessary information, a time to exchange ideas with their peers, and a chance to interact with the superintendent. We were surprised that principals could articulate so well the benefits of those meetings, and still not translate the same benefits to meetings with their own teaching faculty.

Although many of the teachers we interviewed were frustrated with their faculty meetings, they were not letting the principals know about their feelings. We found that few principals realized how their teachers felt and that many held the illusion that they were communicating well with their staffs. Pleasant, informal exchanges between principals and teachers, one-on-one, often belied the reality that their sharing influence in running the school was seldom occurring and that many teachers were frustrated about that.

We surmised that since more than 50% of the male administrators had been coaches, many of them conceived of communication and teamwork as unidirectional and hierarchical, as a kind of military teaming, rather than viewing educational teamwork as transactional and egalitarian. In contrast, with only one exception, every female administrator we interviewed and observed was more aware of and more skillful in the give and take of interpersonal communication, discussing feelings without defensiveness and the power that can be realized from egalitarian teamwork.

Just 10% of the administrators we interviewed were women. Of the 25 superintendents, all were men, only two of whom were minorities (both Hispanic). Seventy-three of the 84 principals were men; four were Blacks. All 48 of the secondary principals, except one assistant in a high school, were men. Of the 36 elementary principals, 10 were women (8 were heads, 2 were assistants). Over 80% of the administrators had grown up close to the district in which they were currently employed. Incredibly,

over 90% of the teachers with whom we spoke had grown up very close to where they were now teaching. Only in three towns, well known as resort and vacation sites, did we find many teachers from out of the area.

Over half of the male administrators had been coaches earlier in their careers. Only three had earned doctorates, all superintendents. The most frequently mentioned accomplishments by the superintendents, in this order, were new or remodeled facilities, fiscal maneuvers to scrimp and save, curriculum changes, and personnel actions to hire effective or eliminate ineffective personnel.

The majority of superintendents and principals suffered from the illusion that clear and open communication was being achieved with their teachers. In several instances, effective communication was not even taking place between superintendents and principals. The most exemplary instances of collaboration, involvement, and shared influence were taking place in seven of the eight elementary schools that had women principals. In those places, we witnessed teamwork, excitement, and enthusiasm. The one woman principal for whom that scenario did not fit was worn out and about to retire.

The Participation of Teachers with Teachers

Many of the teachers we spoke with, even though they said they were satisfied with their own teaching assignment, thought that teachers as a group were under siege. Considering the multitude of pressures under which teachers work, they thought the teaching profession was receiving unreasonable attacks. Over half of all teachers complained about the lack of supportive communication with their own administrators, and over 70% spoke of their concern with the many reform reports, both national and statewide, that proclaim in no uncertain terms that contemporary teachers are not doing an effective job. The allegations in the reform reports cover the nation; small-town teachers thought they were being unfairly included.

Over 75% of the teachers we interviewed were women. Indeed, the only schools in which men and women were distributed 50-50 were the senior high schools. The women and the men did seem to find a satisfying refuge in their informal interactions with teachers of the same sex. Women more than men spoke with one another about instructional matters and concern about students. The men who formed cliques tended more than the women to confer with one another about out-of-school interests, such as sports, fishing, hunting, and the like. Most of the teachers believed that they were doing a good job, particularly in the face of the high number of one-parent families, which in the teachers' minds were associated with lowered support at home for the school's programs. Teachers talked a lot with one another about students missing school for reasons other than sickness and students not getting

homework done on time. About 25% of the teachers felt demoralized because they believed the reform reports were not placing sufficient blame on the family for lowered student achievement in school.

While the demand for higher student achievement was clearly present around the country, some states had taken on school reform with a vengeance, especially in the parts of the South that are without unions. Through initiatives by governors, new reform laws by legislatures, and new strategies by state departments of education, demands were being put on teachers to raise the achievement levels of their students. Most typical were major changes in teachers' evaluation, calling for increased administrative scrutiny of classroom instruction. Invariably those new evaluation procedures had been influenced strongly by Madeline Hunter's theory of effective teaching. In a few towns new procedures for teacher evaluation also were accompanied by state-wide funding of career ladders, a system of increased pay for meritorious teaching.

Many teachers were talking often with one another about the new pressures on them, except for those two or three teachers in each school who chose to climb the new career ladders and who were often separated off from the rest of the staff, interacting more with the site administrators than their colleagues. Even though Hunter and others, who have written about essential teaching skills, have argued that teaching can be improved through collegial support, peer coaching, and teaming, we saw only three schools in which attention was being given to collegial collaboration. And in two of those, the possibilities of peer coaching and teaming were only being considered; they were not being implemented.

In short, formal collegial collaboration seemed to be occurring very infrequently in small towns, despite the small size and presumed family spirit of the school. When faculty collaboration was occurring, it seemed entirely due to the leadership of the site administrators. Teachers were communicating with one another but mostly to complain about parents, administrators, and students. They tended not to communicate about the substance of their teaching, nor did they come together often to solve problems and make decisions about instruction. Still, in many of the places we visited, many teachers, particularly in the elementary and middle schools, felt like they belonged to the faculty, identified with the school's norms, and enjoyed teaching and living in a small town.

The Participation of Teachers with Students

Of the 50 classes we observed, we soared to heights of delight in some and sank to depths of disappointment in others. We felt repeatedly joyful in the kindergartens, and vowed that on our blue days we would visit a kindergarten to lift our spirits. "Discover

children in this school; you'll see how much like play some work can be" was written above the kindergarten room in one school and we wished it had represented the philosophy at other grades. Kindergartens were full of color and variety; they had multiple learning centers entailing lofts, tents, sandboxes, fish ponds or bowls, animal cages, music and art centers, and other nooks and crannies of fascination. The students were curious, active, bright-eyed, and smiling. The teachers, in all instances women, were relaxed, complimentary, active, smiling, and caring. We were impressed too by some of the activity or exploratory classes in middle schools, which contained some of those same elements. Typically, they had girls and boys together painting, making jewelry, sewing, cooking, repairing machines, and working at computers. There, too, the students seemed curious, active, and involved; the teachers, both men and women, were relaxed and helpful, at times chatting with small groups of students about what to do next, other times tutoring one-to-one. We also saw some very exciting, captivating, and stimulating teaching in a few high school English classes. In one we listened to a poignant, thoroughly absorbing discussion about a short story by Ann Beatty ("Imagine A Day at the End of Your Life") on growing old and being yourself at last. The teacher sat with his 15 students, informally offering his feelings and eliciting theirs about what was important to them and how they wanted to live. They delicately probed the meaning of their lives together.

We were disappointed, however, more often than we were delighted. We witnessed in 80% of the classes what Ned Flanders called the rule of two-thirds; i.e, two-thirds of classroom talk is teacher's talk, and two-thirds of that is unidirectional lecturing. With our experience we would modify Flanders' maxim to the rule of three-fourths. The classes were typically teacher-centered; we saw teachers standing up front lecturing to rows of students, with only occasional student talk as a response to teacher questions. In only ten classes did we see student-to-student talk that was planned by the teacher. Four times we saw students in pairs conferring together in response to the teacher's questions, and six times we saw students in small groups working together on a problem or a project. Our experiences were especially sobering considering that we had deliberately asked principals to introduce us to teachers who were using learning groups or cooperative learning. Indeed, a considerable number of principals thought about ability grouping when we asked them if any teacher used groups for learning. We found ability grouping still popular, particularly in grades one through four for reading and math. We found only a few instances of cooperative learning.

The Vulnerable Vortex

In Oregon, rock formations near the banks of rivers like the Deschutes, Rogue, and Umpqua are unstable. Under the upheaval of earthquakes and Pacific storms, fallen timber comes crashing into

rocks, shooting them off like giant marbles into the river, changing the river's course, its flow, and its churning. Wise rafters realize that the river will be different from year to year, they must discover again and again the recently fallen boulders, the new white water, the presence of logs, and the new location of the eddy. The safe vortex of a season ago could be the vulnerable vortex of today.

The small-town school is the vulnerable vortex of the 1990's. Over 75% of the towns we visited were in deep economic trouble. Those that were not were blessed with desirable scenery and recreational facilities for tourism, a military post, or a well-endowed private college. Many were virtual ghost towns in which the number of stores had shrunk to 25% of what there were ten years ago. Strategically placed shopping malls set out between small towns were draining shoppers from over half of the places we went. Local newspapers were scraping to get by on sharply reduced advertising. In some of the towns, the schools were having problems attracting high quality teachers, particularly in the sciences. In other towns, experienced teachers of 10 to 12 years were being discharged, because of budget reductions, and other towns hadn't hired a new teacher in many years. And in all but those districts fortunate enough to receive federal-impact funds, we saw superintendent after superintendent struggling with a tight budget.

Whether the town's economy was based on "copper, cotton, cattle, and climate" as in the Southwest or on "grain, corn, and hogs" as in the Midwest, small towns and small-town schools were in severe economic jeopardy. Inequitable state funding, antiquated industries, and vanishing small farms were drastically changing the portrait of many small towns that had relied on a single economic source. As the economic conditions worsened, teachers remained the last and often only professional class of workers in the town. School board membership also reflected the economic changes, with fewer and fewer professionals serving.

There was a widening class disparity in small towns. Many of the former middle managers of industry and owners of small and medium size farms had left, leaving mostly service or blue-collar workers behind. Teachers often remained the only bureaucratic workers in a struggling entrepreneurial economy. One town, still hurting from a teacher's strike, demonstrated the disparity between the bureaucratic teachers and the entrepreneurial community. Whereas teachers were asking for an increase in medical and retirement benefits, the board, unsympathetic with the teachers' wishes, was composed solely of farmers and other entrepreneurs who had to pay for their own medical insurance and retirement. Where once small towns embodied the family roots, today they attract the uprooted. Where once small towns were stable, today they have a significant migratory population.

Although schools in most places were successfully operating as the safe vortexes for their communities in their extra-curricular activities, they were not being particularly effective internally in fostering democratic participation. We rarely found administrators sharing influence with teachers, colleagues exchanging ideas about instruction, classroom teachers employing cooperative learning, or students having a voice in how the schools were being run. School was not typically a very supportive and cooperative climate for administrators, teachers, or students.

There was a naivete among our interviewees, too, about established strategies to achieve democratic participation. Among the 123 administrators we interviewed, only two had heard of "organization development." Out of 119 teachers, only 10 recognized the term "cooperative learning" and only 20 teachers acknowledged having students work in groups that were not ability groups. Indeed, some of those teachers apologized for group work, saying it was their "last resort" in working with difficult students. In only two districts did we find the presence of established and regular communication lines between superintendent, principals, teachers, and board members. Nowhere did we find students with formal authority to share in problem solving and decision making with administrators.

The absence of collaboration and cooperation in small-town schools may be understood, perhaps, by considering the load carried by administrators and teachers. We saw superintendents not only developing budgets, hiring and firing personnel, working on curriculum, conferring with attorneys, meeting with the board, and attending Rotary, but also driving a bus, attending out-of-town sports events, and directing traffic. We saw principals not only supervising teachers, running faculty meetings, dealing with discipline problems, observing classes and hall behavior, and managing school supplies, but also coaching the track team, acting as athletic director, working on bus schedules, and coordinating the curriculum for the district. We even saw one district where the principals had no school secretary! We saw some teachers teaching six or even seven hours a day without time for preparation or grading papers, and then spending another two or three hours supervising an extracurricular activity after school. Small town educators are the Jacks and Jills of many trades. Perhaps educators of our small-town schools are not adept at democratic participation because they are overworked and stuck in routines that keep them from cooperating. Yet they suffer from an illusion of democracy because of the district's small size, the informality of the community, and the high participation of citizens in the schools.

Teaching has been referred to as the imperilled profession. Nowhere is the profession more imperilled than in small towns. There are more than three million teachers in the United States, making them the largest professional collectivity in the country.

And teachers are the primary professionals in small towns. Still they seem to be a relatively invisible resource to the town and to the nation. They are not particularly valued, respected, nor are they very well paid.

Recommendations for Renewal

Among the most pressing needs of small-town schools are renewal and reinvigoration of the educators, a renewed sense of commitment to the academic side of schooling by the parents, and more avenues of influence for the students. Teachers could benefit from sabbaticals, travel, and the challenge of teaching in another environment for a while. Parents could benefit from school-sponsored support groups to enhance their ability to reinforce the academic program at home. Students could benefit from some innovative structures for student government, and from homerooms and guidance groups through which they might influence not only the homecoming dance but also the effectiveness of the academic program.

The changes must also go beyond what the small towns can do for themselves. Economic and structural problems run too deep and assistance must be provided at state and federal levels. To increase teacher mobility and to allow teachers and administrators to become unstuck from their local patterns, particularly when they have taught in the same place for 15 to 20 years, we recommend state and national incentives. Exchange programs within and across state lines should be encouraged. A national retirement system, analogous to TIAA-CREF in higher education, would allow educators to move across state lines without altering their retirement benefits. To bring qualified teachers to areas that have trouble recruiting teachers, we recommend a national Teachers' Corp, similar to the Peace Corp. To bring about increased collaboration and shared decision making in small-town schools, we recommend continued federal funds, such as exist in Project LEAD, to help educate practicing administrators to understand schools as organizational systems and to work skillfully in them. We also recommend the selection of more women, most of whom bring a more collaborative style of leadership to administration than do men. The small-town school as a safe vortex must include more than support for football teams and the band. It must go beyond that to include the pursuit of the intellect and a respect for democracy as a process for working together in school.

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